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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION BEGINNING TO COALESCE?

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) John Nwodo Jr., an Enugu based lawyer and political activist and former Minister of Information, told Poloff that he sees the need for a unified opposition to the bad governance Nigeria has suffered under the PDP. Nwodo said that there was a meeting recently in Enugu of "like-minded people from different parties" including General Muhammadu Buhari, former Biafran leader General Chukwuemeka Ojukwu and Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu to discuss formation of a coalition to contest the 2007 presidency. Nwodo believes that these opposition figures from different parties and different regions will be able to lay personal ambitions aside to pursue the common goal of defeating the PDP in 2007.

He speculated that the coalition might eventually be expanded to include Sokoto Governor Bafarawa and possibly Senate President Ken Nnamani, both of whom he is in close contact with. The main problem this nascent coalition faces is deciding on which party's ticket the opposition candidate will run.

¶2. (C) Nwodo posited that Vice President Atiku Abubakar and General Ibrahim Babangida only remain in the PDP in hopes of playing a spoiler role. He said that IBB and Atiku know they cannot gain the PDP nomination. They plan to remain in the PDP through the nomination process in order to point out the PDP national convention's problems loudly and publicly, then to leave the PDP with great fanfare, taking many followers with them and splintering the party.

¶3. (C) On the issue of zoning, Nwodo said that the North has had power for "too long" and that the "South-South probably has the best argument" for its turn at the presidency. However, Nwodo believes that no good candidates have emerged from the South-South and that the southerners will probably accept a northern candidate.

¶4. (C) Nwodo worried that the Nigerian people are frustrated by the current political environment and said that some are "clamoring for a coup." He speculated that if the government postpones the April elections, the military might step in. Once the civilian government has breached the constitution, Nwodo explained, what would stop the military from stepping in under the mantra of "wiping the slate clean" of corrupt politicians? He predicted that the Nigerian people might accept a coup similar to the one in Thailand earlier this year.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Nwodo, the well-spoken representative of a prominent Igbo political family, has kept his ties to all of the current actors in Nigeria's political drama, shuttling

frequently among Abuja, Lagos, Minna, Sokoto and Enugu. While his remarks reflect an aspect of his personal wishes, his comments about the mood of the nation and the potential of an opposition coalition reflect more than wishful thinking.

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